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About half of the candidates, especially those with established local reputations, confined their platforms to glittering generalities. However, a number of significant issues did emerge. Included were calls for speedy and just compensation for war damages and promises to insure better use of economic aid. Protection of Vietnamese sovereignty and cultural values was emphasized. Official corruption and arrogance toward the citizenry was often criticized. Catholics emphasized stability, Buddhists religious freedom. Not one of the half-dozen real peace candidates identified in Corps area did well, and a virulently anti-American candidate in Binh Duong finished last in field of twenty-five. Viet Cong anti-election activity was minimal.

The Turnout

Voter turnout in III CTZ (not including Saigon) for the Lower House elections was off 11.8 percent from the Presidential election percentage posted on 3 September. The Corps turnout thus dropped slightly more than the nationwide decline of 10.1 percent.

In the Corps area, 949,494 voters are reported to have turned out on 22 October. This is 70.3 percent of registration. As on 3 September, urbanized areas dragged down the III CTZ average. Gia Dinh province turnout fell by 14.7 percent, to 64.5 percent of registration, Bien Hoa by 10.4 percent to 68.4, and Vung Tau by 10.9 percent to 75.3. These three areas contain fifty-eight percent of the Corps area's registered voters. In the nine predominantly rural provinces the drop ranged from 9.4 percent to a low of 5.2 percent in Binh Duong.

A falloff in turnout of from five to ten percent was expected. American observers in most provinces had reported a general lack of enthusiasm by voters for what was, for most of them, the fifth election in fourteen months and the fourth in seven months. The exceptions were remoter provinces such as Binh Tuy and Binh Long, which the Presidential and Senatorial candidates had ignored, and which were enjoying a stormy Lower House race. Observers also noted that GVN military and civilian officials were simultaneously displaying a high degree of professional competence in the organization of the election and evident boredom with the whole affair. A number suggested to their counterparts that they would be delighted when the elections were finally over and they could get back to their "real" jobs.

It appears that very few registrants who failed to turn out on 3 September cared, or dared, to vote at this time. Observers in Long An noted not a single instance of this, and in one rural polling place, while with the provincial VIS Chief, an observer learned

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that officials had turned away a few such would-be voters. At this point (1100 hours) the VIS Chief corrected the polling station chief and issued orders to VIS cadre to get out the message that 3 September non-voters had not lost their right to vote this time.

Through the Corps area, minor officials and cadre industriously reminded voters of their civic duties, often going from door to door on election day. A straw poll by Vietnamese CORDS employees in Long An indicated that about a third of a sample of twenty-six voters had gone to the polls solely of their own volition; the rest said they voted because a government representative told them they ought to, or to "avoid difficulties." Another straw poll, of working-class voters in three districts of Bien Hoa, found all sixty respondents apathetic toward the election. Many indicated a profound distrust of the candidates' motives. A Phuoc Tuy observer, comparing the Lower House election with the 3 September vote, noted that "crowds were not in evidence. The holiday atmosphere, complete with flags, music and banners, which characterized the earlier contest, was missing. Voters were sober, displaying little gaiety. Voting was rapid and businesslike..."

Official Conduct of the Election

As in previous elections, the Lower House elections, in general, appear to have been fairly run by the GVN. Across the Corps area, ranking provincial officials seemed less interested in the outcome and there were fewer charges of high-level favoritism. Nonetheless, in every province one or several candidates was identified -- often with intent to smear -- as "the official candidate," or "the province chief's candidate." A number of candidates were quite obviously receiving help from civil service friends. In some cases detailed allegations that ranking officials in Saigon had ordered or requested provincial subordinates to assist certain candidates were reported. The VIS, National Police and Military Security Service were most often the target of these claims. In any event, candidates alleged to have a GVN stamp of approval did not fare significantly better than their rivals.

Provincial officials were, of course, under pressure to report impressive voter turnouts. In Bien Hoa, provincial turnout was posted quite late, well after other III CTZ provinces. It may be that province officials wished to check the turnout in other parts of the nation before posting Bien Hoa's 68.4 percent total. By contrast, a preliminary province-wide turnout of 80.7 percent was announced in Long An about three hours after the polls closed. This figure aroused critical comment from U.S. observers and candidates alike; the figure was obviously inflated. The following morning, after the size of the vote elsewhere had been broadcast

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on the radio, the turnout figure was revised sharply downward to a more believable 75.6 percent. No explanation was offered.

More perplexing is the heavy vote reported from Gia Dinh province's most urban districts late in the day. A CORDS Vietnamese employee who monitored the voting in Tan Binh District (about 182,000 registered voters) was told that about 1400 hours the province chief had instructed district officials "to do something" about the district's turnout, which then stood at 31.2 percent. The source notes that the number of voters between 1400 and 1600 hours did not increase greatly at the polling stations he visited. Nonetheless, Tan Binh district reported that at 1600 hours the turnout had risen to 56.5 percent of registration. In other words, nearly as many voters were said to have voted in Tan Binh during the final two hours as had voted in the first six, at the same time that turnout had slowed to a trickle in most provinces. An argument can also be made that vote figures were inflated in Go Vap (158,000 registrants) and Thu Duc (76,000 registrants) districts, both of which reported a heavy vote in the last two hours, although observers noted no increase in turnout.

Unlike the 3 September elections, when it was obvious that officials in one Gia Dinh district (Binh Chanh) had grossly distorted the reported ballot count in favor of General Thieu, there is no hard evidence that Gia Dinh officials were pushing individual candidates in the Lower House election. It is not impossible that the victories of some of Gia Dinh's eleven representatives were engineered, however. Only a few hundred votes separated winners from losers, and many of the top province and district officials are loyal to National Police Director General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. CORDS, III CTZ, survey personnel were told in strictest confidence by close friends in Binh Chanh that "district officials had received orders from Captain Nguyen Nghiem Ton, the district chief, to vote for such and such candidates." However, reports the survey team, they said "we cannot disclose details because we are afraid that if we were found out, we might suffer many bad consequences, perhaps including death." Gia Dinh candidates alleged numerous irregularities. In several instances it was discovered that a given candidate did not have any ballots in a particular polling place. A more serious incident occurred at a polling place in Phu Nhuan, Tan Binh district, where two election officials were caught red-handed stuffing a ballot box. Both of these charges have been verified, and there were undoubtedly many more irregularities. The evidence is far from sufficient, however, to implicate Gia Dinh provincial authorities in anything beyond inflating their turnout figures.

Charges of official favoritism were also quite common in Long Khanh in the wake of Nguyen Minh Dang's victory. Dang, a staunch backer

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of Nguyen Cao Ky in the Constituent Assembly, is alleged to have been rewarded with both lavish funding and some strong-arm support by national andprovincial authorities.

The Candidates and the Campaign

The candidates themselves provided most of the drama in the Lower House election. Usually they mobilized family and friends to canvass their area, thus getting a substantial body of citizens involved. A few emerged as effective grass-roots campaigners. Most, however, seemed to think private politicking with local influentials was more effective than getting out into the hustings. For example, only sixteen of the thirty candidates in Bien Hoa bothered to appear at more than half of the eight group appearances scheduled about the province by the Bien Hoa Election Council. Only in Gia Dinh did the local ground-rules permit individual campaigning in public. As a consequence, loudspeaker trucks and lambrettas touting particular candidates were seen and heard on Gia Dinh roads. A number of candidates collectively worked the villages along Route 4 in Binh Chanh, sharing a tri-lambretta. Constituent Assemblywoman Tran Thi Xa campaigned in Nha Be district with her children.

In Bien Hoa, crowds at the public campaign appearances were small, averaging 250 persons. Binh Duong sources reported an average turnout of 750 for that province's six campaign appearances, and estimated that one week before the election about one-third of the voters knew something about one or more candidates. In entertainment starved Binh Tuy, which had one Lower House candidate for every two thousand voters, observers characterized the speeches as well attended, and "greeted with applause and cheering by the listeners."

A number of candidates are alleged to have spent massive sums on their campaigns. In every province, one or more candidates was alleged to be attempting to buy his election. Significantly, like those accused of having official support, the wealthy candidates did not seem to have done much better than their rivals. Following election day the air in Gia Dinh was filled with complaints of betrayal. The story is told of an unsuccessful candidate who stormed into the office of a district chief demanding to know what had happened to all the votes he had contracted for with two million piasters. One defeated candidate, by contrast, attributed his failure to a lack of funds with which to bribe village and hamlet chiefs. Another complained that his 300,000 piaster donation to the Nong Cong Binh bloc had gained him nothing. In Gia Dinh, a resolution by thirty-one presumably defeated candidates demanded an investigation of the election because it "stank of money."

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Political Organizations (Ref A)

With one major exception, partisan political organizations were markedly unsuccessful in mobilizing voters. The exception was the largely northern Catholic Greater Solidarity Forces (GSF); Tan Dai Viet party, Nong Cong Binh bloc and CVT (labor) candidates appear to have done poorly.

The GSF elected one candidate each in Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy and Vung Tau. A fifth GSF candidate was nipped in a vote recount in Gia Dinh I. Inasmuch as about ten other Catholic candidates appear to have won election in III CTZ (of twenty-nine seats), the area's Catholic minority (20-25 percent) is once again heavily over-represented in Saigon. Some of these other Catholic winners may also be beholden to the GSF. The secret of Catholic success in this election, as has often been demonstrated in the past, is tight organization and discipline. In an extreme case, Catholic priests in Phuoc Tuy are reported to have urged their devoted flocks during Sunday morning mass to go and vote for winning candidate Tran Anh Linh. Wins in Phuoc Tuy and Vung Tau were gains for the Catholics, who had been unable to agree on a candidate in the Constituent Assembly election a year ago. The proliferation of hopefuls in Binh Tuy (thirteen, as against two a year ago) virtually assured the election of Catholic standard-bearer Nguyen Trong Buong. By contrast, in Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh the Catholics were unable to close ranks. Had they shown the solidarity which their co-religionists in remoter provinces displayed, they could have won all, rather than half of the seats in those two provinces. It appears, however, that the more sophisticated Gia Dinh and Bien Hoa Catholics feel less embattled than before, and thus intra-Catholic rivalries have emerged. In particular, the "Prepare for Armageddon!" appeal of the more conservative parish priests seems to evoke less response, and the voice of more liberal Catholic groups is now being heard.

The Tan Dai Viet organization, which deserved a great deal of credit for Truong Dinh Dzu's strong showing in III CTZ on 3 September, appears now to be in an (probably temporary) eclipse. Since about two weeks before the election, the party in III CTZ has been under strong pressure from the GVN, particularly, it appears, from elements loyal to Nguyen Cao Ky. One strong TDV Lower House candidate was eliminated from the race on a pretext. Another, Tran Van Meo (Long An), was assassinated. Meo's assailants are unknown, but many believe they were probably not Viet Cong. Known TDV provincial leaders have in many cases been transferred (if GVN officials) or allegedly placed under surveillance. One well known leader, again in Long An, has been relieved and placed under

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house arrest, allegedly by order of III Corps Commander General Khang. The result has been a general decline in party morale, some defections and, in most provinces, virtual paralysis. It is in this light that the TDV's very poor showing on 22 October must be evaluated. It appears that only one party sympathizer, Nguyen Van Qui (Hau Nghia), was elected to the Lower House from III CTZ.

The Nong Cong Binh bloc and the CVT labor union, which united to turn out a massive vote for the Tran Van Don Senate list on 3 September, did not do well in III Corps this time. The Nong Cong Binh (Farmer-Worker-Soldier) group claims that Pham Duy Tue, elected from Gia Dinh, and Mac Giao, successful in Bien Hoa, received NCB help. However, neither used the bloc's symbol or were known to be identified with it prior to their victories. In contrast, other candidates widely known to have had Nong Cong Binh endorsement went down to defeat. At the beginning of the campaign, CVT prospects seemed good. However, three of their strongest candidates were eliminated. One fell by the wayside on a technicality in Hau Nghia, another, on grounds that his activities had "been profitable to Communism", was denied permission to run in Bien Hoa. Both exclusions appear to have been trumped up. The third CVT hopeful was the assassinated Captain Meo, who enjoyed CVT as well as TDV party endorsement. CVT candidates in Binh Duong, Long Khanh, Binh Long and Gia Dinh ran respectably, but did not come near winning.

One winner in Gia Dinh, Nguyen Huu Duc, is said to have ties to the Revolutionary Dai Viet party, which did well in Central Viet Nam. Two Cao Dai were elected from that religion's fief in Tay Ninh. Both apparently have good connections with the church hierarchy. "Peace" candidates, some of whom consciously modeled their campaigns after Truong Dinh Dzu, without exception did poorly.

Campaign Issues (Ref B)

About half of the candidates confined themselves to glittering generalities in their public appearances and campaign literature. Usually these non-controversial candidates were local citizens who emphasized their local reputations and knowledge of and by the people. On the other hand, little known outsiders tended to advance concrete campaign planks in order to attract attention, generally to little avail.

Universally popular with the candidates were such well-worn themes as economic development, social welfare and better education. A considerable number of candidates developed this theme in an anti-Government or anti-American vein, however. Calls were heard for

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"better use of economic aid"; significantly, it was the GVN which was usually faulted for the failure of aid funds to reach the common people. Speedy and just compensation for war damages was also a common theme. Occasionally, unpaid defoliation claims were deplored. An anti-American bias was implicit in often-heard vows to protect Vietnamese cultural values. Some candidates also called for an end to the importation of foreign workers.

"Sovereignty" was a major theme. In part, reaction to recent Newsweek articles seems to have heightened interest in the issue. "Sovereignty" seems, however, to have become a genuine matter of concern to sophisticated Vietnamese, and it was an issue that candidates could push without crossing the GVN authorities. A survey of posters in Bien Hoa revealed nine of twenty-nine candidates stressing "protection of national rights" or some variation of this. Bien Hoa residents, it should be noted, have had massive exposure to the seamier aspects of the American presence. Northern refugees often included a plank on reunification of the nation; some called for "liberation of the North". In refugee Catholic circles, of course, this theme is as common as "States' Rights" in Dixie.

"Social justice" was a very common plank in the platform of GVN critics. Few of them dared to spell out plainly what they meant in public. In general, "social justice" is understood to involve protection against arbitrary arrest, equitable draft policies, freedom from unjust levies and shakedowns, indemnification for property destruction, and so forth.

"Corruption", as might be expected, came in for a lot of criticism. There are no reports of anyone naming names.

Many candidates talked about "Peace" (Ref C), but, nine times out of ten, they explained that they meant "Peace with Honor", "Peace with Freedom" or something similar. There were only a half dozen real "doves" identified in the Corps area and none of them came close to winning. A favorite theme with Catholics was "stability", which apparently means keeping Tri Quang and other Buddhist "neutralists" in check. Candidates angling for the Buddhist vote, by contrast, often included a plank on the "protection of religious freedom".

Two candidates are reported to have included slashing attacks on US policies. Nguyen Van Khai, in Binh Duong, is said to have "electrified crowds" with eloquent attacks on US policy, bureaucratic American advisors and US emphasis on "mechanical war" rather than political and guerrilla war. He also criticized the US for supporting a "capitalist clique" that steals American aid until such time as aroused public opinion forces them into exile.

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Khai, incidentally, finished last in a field of twenty-five. Cao Dinh Hue, a Bien Hoa radical, was a more potent campaigner. Hue, who missed winning a seat by only five hundred votes, apparently profited from the charge that Census Grievance cadre are actually "agents of a foreign power" and should be treated as such.

Much of the rhetoric expended during the two week campaign was obviously empty oratory, and was regarded by the voters as such. Few citizens would put much faith in the Gia Dinh candidate who promised farmers agricultural loans if elected, for instance, and less could believe the candidate who is reported to have offered voters his head if he didn't perform as promised. Nonetheless, the issues mentioned above, in varying degree, trouble a lot of Vietnamese, and ought to be noted.

Challenges

Post-election challenges loom in at least three provinces -- Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa and Phuoc Tuy. In Gia Dinh, the Greater Solidarity Force has announced that it will contest the recount that dropped its candidate, Nguyen Van Hien, from sixth place (and a Lower House seat) in the Gia Dinh I standings. In Bien Hoa, fifth place finisher Cao Dinh Hue is protesting overzealous support by two Catholic priests to Nguyen Khac Tan, who barely edged Hue for Bien Hoa's fourth Lower House seat. Hue also cries foul over complimentary articles to Tan which appeared in Kay Dung, the leading northern Catholic daily. Close runner-up Nguyen Huu Hieu in Phuoc Tuy has lodged similar charges against victor Tran Anh Linh.

Viet Cong Counter-Election Activity

Viet Cong attempts to sabotage the elections hit a new low. Counter-election propaganda was weak and had no discernible effect. With the exception of Binh Long, where ARVN units made contact with enemy forces twice on the night preceding the election, there was little action worth noting. Only a few and widely scattered incidents of terrorism or sabotage were reported.

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